



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### About...Q fever

##### What is Q fever?

Q fever is a disease caused by the germ *Coxiella burnetii*. The disease can range from no signs of illness to a severe chronic infection. In some cases it may be fatal. The germ can cause a number of clinical presentations including pneumonia, heart problems, liver problems, and bone infections. It can also cause neurological problems such as encephalitis, meningitis, or dementia. The disease occurs worldwide.

##### How is Q fever spread?

Q fever is a disease of animals; the primary animal hosts are sheep, goats, and cattle. The germ is shed in milk, urine, feces, and birth products of infected animals. Humans can get the germ from breathing it in. Drinking raw milk or eating products like soft cheese that have been made from raw milk are also ways people get the germ. The germ is not easy to kill with normal heat, drying, and common disinfectants. It only takes a very small number of these germs to cause disease in humans. This disease is a risk to farmers, livestock handlers, workers in meat packing plants, and others with animal related jobs.

##### Who is at risk for getting Q fever?

People who have on-the-job exposure to animals that have the germ are at risk for Q fever. These people might include veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, sheep and dairy farm workers, livestock farmers, and researchers at facilities housing sheep. Individuals that drink unpasteurized (raw) milk are also at increased risk.

##### How do I know if I have Q fever?

The incubation period (time from getting the germ to the when you get sick) is around 2 to 3 weeks. Roughly ½ of the individuals who get the germ will have signs of illness.

Signs of Q fever are:

- High fever (104 – 105° F)
- Chills, sweats
- Intense headache
- Fatigue with painful or tender muscles and joints
- Dry cough, sore throat
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea

Often the infection develops into pneumonia and sometimes hepatitis. Roughly 1-2% of individuals with acute disease will die without treatment. Some will develop chronic Q fever. People who have heart valve disease or those with weak immune systems are also at higher risk. The chance of dying from this disease is highest in people with chronic illness.

If you think that you have Q fever see a doctor now.

### **How is Q fever treated?**

Q fever is treated with medicine from a doctor. There is not currently a vaccine against this disease in the United States.

### **How is Q fever prevented?**

Drink only pasteurized milk. Individuals with high risk jobs (meat processing, veterinarians, sheep and dairy workers, livestock farmers, and researchers using livestock especially sheep) should be aware of the disease. Since sheep and goats tend to shed the germ more with birth products, all placenta, fetal membranes, and aborted fetuses should be disposed of in a manner to prevent soil contamination.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/qfever/>

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